

**Madam State Secretary, Madam President of the Høgskolen, Mr President of the Holberg Fund, Madame, Kjaere venner,**

It is both an honour and a pleasure to open this seminar with you, Madam State Secretary, because scientific research is a field of excellence in the cooperation between our two countries. France is in fact the only European country with which Norway has a bilateral agreement in this field, that was signed last year by our two ministers for research and higher education. And I am very glad that exchanges between Norwegian and French researchers also encompass social sciences.

I would like to congratulate the Høgskolen i Oslo for organising “Les journées Kristeva 2009”. The programme and the level of the participants are very impressive.

Madame,

C’est un grand honneur pour moi de participer à l’ouverture de ces journées Kristeva. Nous sommes à l’ambassade très heureux et très fiers de vous voir à nouveau en Norvège, où vous avez été la première à recevoir le prix Holberg. Avec votre permission, j’aimerais parler un peu de vous.

As you all know, Julia Kristeva is one of the most prominent and original French intellectuals. She has approached and connected together so many fields of knowledge that she is really in a class all of her own.

She is also, not only by birth but also by conviction, a real European, a European who has been reflecting on the meaning of Europe. I am very glad Madame, that you are about to share with us your thinking on the idea of Europe. It is certainly a debate which is worth having here in Norway, quietly but thoroughly, away from the limited and politically charged alternative “yes or no to the EU”.

Julia Kristeva is also a universal spirit, very much in the tradition of Les Lumières. She is a citizen of the city and a citizen of the world. She has worked on many issues essential to our societies, reflecting on the situation of individuals in our society, especially of those who suffer from discrimination based on their so-called “difference”, such as handicapped persons, foreigners, and also, in a different manner, women.

But I would like to dwell on another aspect of your work, probably more accessible to a mere diplomat, and which confirms your commitment to take part in debates which are topical for France.

Madame,

You were recently the rapporteur of an advisory opinion of the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council, which is particularly relevant and important for our diplomatic action. It is entitled : “the cultural message of France and the intercultural vocation of la Francophonie”.

I would like to read two quotations from the introduction to this report, because, in my view, they summarise very exactly what should be the main objective of our cultural diplomacy.

“Against the universalism which trivialises cultural traditions and modern expressions, against the “communautarism” which juxtaposes social and cultural entities, the French concept stemming from Les Lumières, carried by Republican ambitions, respects diversity, while at the same time maintaining that they can be translated, interpreted, shared”.

“Faithful to its ideals of liberty, equality, solidarity, to the values of democracy and human rights”, “the cultural message of France is an incentive to defend and support the other cultures with a view to enhancing their value, dignity, creativity and reciprocal sharing”.

The French minister of Foreign affairs, Bernard Kouchner, addressing in July our network of diplomats in charge of culture and science, stressed that “the ability to listen to others and not only to promote our cultural successes” had to be an essential characteristic of our cultural diplomacy. He also underlined that promoting exchanges and cultural diversity, including through supporting the cultural production of countries from the south, was complementary to our action of promotion of our own language and culture. In this context, la Francophonie is a family network of countries working together to promote cultural diversity and the common ideals on which are based our cultural policies.

It seems to me that France and Norway share a common vision of a world where cultural diversity is highly valuable, is not an impediment to exchanges but on the contrary an opportunity. We also share a common vision of the role of the State in the field of culture and research, the State having the responsibility to support creators and researchers, for the benefit of future generations, a concern which economic agents motivated solely by profit cannot meet. It is because we strongly believe that cultural creations are not goods which should be exchanged solely according to market rules, that France took the initiative of the Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions. This convention reaffirms the right of States to conduct policies of protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions.

It also recognizes “that cultural diversity is strengthened by the free flow of ideas, and that it is nurtured by constant exchanges and interaction between cultures”.

I am glad that these “Journées Kristeva” will contribute to the confrontation of ideas and perspectives that is vital to our cultures and our future./.